



Ka Ora, Ka Ako | Healthy School Lunches programme

Healthier lunches for ākonga

Information for suppliers on the Pathway to Nutrition

For some ākonga (learners), a school lunch may be their main meal of the day or the only meal where they eat vegetables and wholegrains.

Regular nutritious food is vital for children's physical, mental and educational development. It affects their ability to focus, concentrate and learn. Ka Ora, Ka Ako provides ākonga with the nutrients their brains and bodies need.

Children's tastes vary and many are not familiar with healthy foods, which can make providing healthy food that gets good uptake from students challenging. Supporting children to enjoy new foods can take time.

Fast facts

Only 44% of ākonga aged 2-14 get adequate fruit and vegetable intake. (National Health Survey 2019/2020)

On average, children and young people are exposed to **27 advertisements for junk food each day**. ([International Journal of Behavioural Nutrition and Physical Activity](#))

At Te Kura o Kimi Ora, although already experienced at providing lunch to around 150 ākonga, the public health nurse noted a **significant reduction in skin infections, from 120 to only eight**, as a result of introducing more nutritious food as part of Ka Ora, Ka Ako.

The Pathway to Nutrition

The Pathway to Nutrition provides support to gradually introduce healthy foods without losing ākonga engagement along the way. Guidance includes how to build and adapt menus to align with the [Ministry of Health's healthy food and drink guidance for schools](#) and [Ka Ora, Ka Ako nutrition guidance](#) over the first six months of the contract, in ways that give ākonga time to learn to enjoy new foods in a supportive environment. Support from the Ministry includes:

- » advice and feedback from a Ministry in-house nutritionist to review your menus
- » a six-month work plan to provide a pathway to nutrition
- » hosting online supplier forums and information sessions
- » support to engage with schools and understand their needs via your Ministry Senior Advisor

Starting point (baseline)

- At a minimum, all menus must be free of red category items.

Within three months

- An improvement plan is in place that shows how lunches will progress towards meeting Ka Ora, Ka Ako nutritional guidelines.

Within six months

- All menus are made up of at least 75 percent green items.
- All main meals must be made up of at least 75 percent green items.

After six months

- All menus and meals are made up of at least 75 percent green items.
- Suppliers continuously improve menus, introducing more variety.

Basic requirements

To help plan menus, we classify foods and drinks based on their nutritional value using a traffic light system (green, amber and red). This provide a practical way to categorise foods as healthy or less healthy.

As a minimum standard, no red items should be included in school lunches. Amber foods that should not be part of the diet every day but may still have some nutritional value. Green foods contain lots of nutrients and can be eaten every day. Lunches should be made up of amber and green items. As suppliers changes towards offering healthier menu options, the proportion of green ingredients each week should increase and the frequency of amber items each week should decrease.

Red items	Amber items	Green items
<ul style="list-style-type: none">» have poor nutritional value» are high in saturated fat, salt and/or added sugars» can contribute to consuming excess kilojoules/calories» are often highly processed food and drinks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">» are not part of an everyday diet» may have some nutritional value» are often more processed» in large servings, can contribute to consuming excess kilojoules/calorie.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">» are a good source of nutrition» generally lower in saturated fat, salt and added sugar» are mostly whole and less processed» vegetables, fruit, wholegrains, low fat milk products, and legumes, seafood, eggs and meat with fat removed.

Read more about types of foods

[Ka-Ora-Ka-Ako-Nutrition-Guidance-OCT-2020.pdf \(education.govt.nz\)](#)

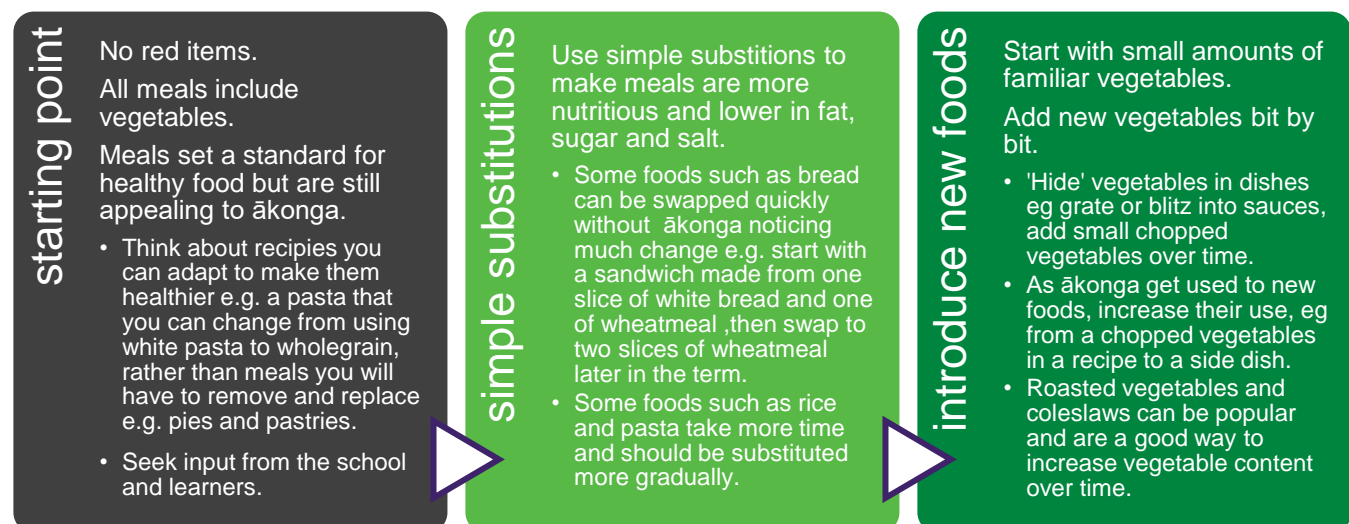
[Healthy Food and Drink Guidance – Schools | Ministry of Health NZ](#)

How to change to healthier menus

Introducing new foods gradually will give time for learners to trust that they will taste good.

There may be some resistance from children each time you change the menu. However, most lunch providers already working with schools tell us that ākongā either don't noticed the change, or complained at first but ate the food anyway and were used to it after a couple of weeks.

As the menu changes, talk to your schools about what has changed and how this benefits nutrition and wellbeing. Give schools information they can share with ākongā and whānau. Adults can set the tone for lunch time, so providing staff with information will support student engagement. This might be as simple as a statement about the menu change and why it was made, or a workshop for staff and ākongā.



Sample menus

These sample menus provide an insight into how you could move towards 75 percent green foods over two school terms.

Term 1, weeks 1-5 (Phase one – student engagement)



	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Menu	Chicken and vegetable wrap	Macaroni cheese	Bacon and egg pie	Spaghetti bolognaise	Pizzas
Amber Ingredients	Salad dressing (incl full fat mayo) Spinach Wrap	White penne pasta Edam cheese (>40g serve) White flour	Rindless bacon Filo pastry or wholemeal pastry	White spaghetti pasta	Standard Pizza base (white) Dutch lean salami
Green Ingredients	Lettuce Grated carrot Tomato Chicken breast Grated edam cheese	Spinach Red onion Milk light blue top Wholemeal breadcrumbs	Egg Onion Spinach/silver beet	Mince, fat removed Grated carrot, zucchini, broccoli stalk Spinach Lentils Edam cheese (40g) Canned tomatoes	Tomato paste Basil Onion Capsicum Edam cheese <40g

Term 1, weeks 6-10 (Phase two – transition to healthier options)



	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Menu	Chicken and vegetable wrap	Macaroni cheese	Frittata	Spaghetti bolognaise	Pizzas
CHANGES	Swap spinach wrap for wholemeal wrap.	Swap 30% of white pasta for wholewheat penne pasta Swap 30% white flour for brown rice flour.	Remove bacon, replace with feta cheese. Include more vegetables (pumpkin, roasted kumara).	Swap 30% white spaghetti for wholewheat spaghetti.	Swap white pizza base for wholemeal. Replace salami with chicken.

Term 2, weeks 11-15 (Final menu – 75 percent green)



	v	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri
Menu	Chicken and vegetable wrap	Macaroni cheese	Frittata	Spaghetti bolognaise	Pizza
CHANGES	Add extra vegetables (eg cucumber, capsicum, grated beetroot, grated zucchini).	65% wholemeal penne 35% white Add more vegetables (eg grated zucchini, mashed pumpkin into cheese sauce)	Wholegrain filo pastry, or remove pastry and serve with extra roast vegetables	100% wholemeal spaghetti	Add more vegetables (e.g. spinach, zucchini) Try a vegetarian pizza.

Process

The purpose of the Pathway to Nutrition transition plan is to support ākonga to learn about and adapt to healthy food in schools where these foods are unfamiliar.

This approach may not be needed in all schools. It is not compulsory to transition your menu if ākonga are already enjoying a lunch that meets the nutritional guidelines. Some suppliers have had success starting with a menu made up of 75 percent green ingredients and have found no need to change, while others have found using a pathway approach effective.

If you need to provide a transition menu, this should first be approved by the Ka Ora, Ka Ako nutritionist.

Working with your school or kura

Schools can support suppliers by providing information and regular feedback on:

- » what ākonga typically eat for lunch and what foods are familiar and unfamiliar to them – this will help you work out a starting point appropriate for the school or kura
- » vegetables and fruits ākonga enjoy
- » which foods the majority of ākonga enjoyed and which they did
- » any meals that are popular with ākonga.

For further information, guidance and menu approval

Jasmin Jackson | Lead Advisor - Nutritionist | jasmin.jackson@education.govt.nz

Or email our team at school.lunches@education.govt.nz

Case in point: The Food Company

The Food Company first began providing lunches to a school of around 500 ākonga. This provided an opportunity to learn more about providing lunches in a school environment and how to engage ākonga in lunches effectively.

The first obstacle to overcome was to introduce ākonga to the idea of a healthy lunch. Items such as brown bread sandwiches were not items commonly seen in lunch boxes. The Food Company initially provided high fibre white bread sandwiches with minimal fillings (eg meat, lettuce, cheese). Once ākonga were eating the sandwiches, they were able to make it more nutritious. Within a month, one slice of white bread was replaced with wholemeal, and additional vegetables like cucumber and tomatoes were added. After around two months they were able to transition to full wholemeal sandwiches.

The Food Company now provides lunches to ten schools, catering to around 3,000 students per day. Lunches now look significantly different.

The Food Company has found that ākonga in different schools start from different places on their healthy eating journey, and they need to adjust their menus and how long it takes to change accordingly. They regularly monitor food scraps to understand how changes to menus are received, eg switching to wholemeal bread before ākonga are ready, and so reverting to a slice of white bread and trying again a few weeks later with more success.

